

# Nate Eppler

The world of Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* is

part of its appeal. Set in the future of next year, the experience of the play is centered in questions of physical and psychological geography and the rules of place. When Actors Bridge Ensemble learned their production of *The Nether* (directed by Jessika Malone) had to be moved out of their traditional theatre space into a converted-chapel second-stage space, they had to radically rethink their set design. In order to achieve the world-building effect in a radically reimagined way, they let the design bleed out of the theatre space into the rest of the audience experience. From

ticketing to lobby design, each element of the audience's experience was set inside the future of *The Nether*. The use of these pseudo-site-specific or environmental theatre tools didn't seek to add content to the play, or alter the text, or present invented scenes or material, but to frame the audience's experience in a kinetic way. The minute I walked into the lobby, it immediately made me reconsider the theatrical boundaries of my own plays. What if I wrote my way into the space outside of the box as part of the story?



NATE EPPER currently serves as Playwright-in-Residence for Nashville Repertory Theatre and as Director of the Nashville Rep Ingram New Works Project. While in residence at Nashville Rep, Mr. Eppler has developed several plays including Long Way Down (ZFs Productions, Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award semi-finalist 2011), Lattices (Nashville Repertory Theatre 2013), Good Monsters (Nashville Repertory Theatre 2016) and The Ice Treatment (GPTC 2016, Actors Bridge Ensemble 2016) In addition to his work as a playwright and teaching artist Mr. Eppler is one of the curators of the Ten Minute Play-

where some women with fistula can be healed with surgery. Jacob illustrates the oppression of women in this region in a hard to watch scene in which Biffu is publically humiliated and kicked off of a public bus. It is a short and simple moment in the play that speaks volumes about intolerance and ignorance. But the most inspiring moment of this play is when Biffu, years later in America, tired of hiding and living in shame, bares all to her eccentric neighbor. By bares all I mean—not only is she nude, but she reveals the ileostomy bag surgically attached to her body. In response, her neighbor also removes his clothing and the two characters continue the remainder of the scene completely nude. (Yes, the dude too, full frontal, score one more for gender equality). While nudity on stage is nothing new and in and of itself not an innovative choice, Jacob's writing coupled with the honest performances of the actors is what made this moment so powerful. We didn't just hear about Biffu's struggle, nor did we empathize from the outside—we experienced it with her. The idea was not to simply focus on the beauty of this woman, and forget that she has a bag of urine attached to her body. The idea was to take it all in, her voice, her spirit, her beauty, and the bag of urine; and come to a new understanding. I was forced to contend with my own discomfort and literally felt my molecules shift as I lived in the moment with the characters—each of them accepting each other and themselves. I aspire to write plays that are culturally specific, and yet transcend culture by capturing authentic human experiences. This play did that with grace and skill.

FRANCE-LUCE BENSON is a playwright based in Brooklyn, NY. She is a Dramatists Guild Fellow 2015-2016 and Lifetime Member at the Ensemble Studio Theatre. Additional awards and honors include: Winner of the National Play Network award for Short Playwriting. (Risen from the Dough); The Kithyos List-Honorable Mention (Boat People); Alfred P. Sloan New Play Commission (The Devil's Sat); Alfred P. Sloan Screenplay Award (Healing Roots); Kennedy Center ACTF Lorraine Hansberry Award-Honorable Mention (Fat's Last Dance); three time scholarship recipient at Upright Citizens Brigade; and two time Schubert Fellow. She is published by Routledge Press, Indie Theatre Now, and The Whimsical Project and she is currently an Associate Professor at St. Johns University, a member of NY-WIFT. MFA in Dramatic Writing, Carnegie Mellon University. Proud member of the Dramatists Guild.